

Senator Rob Mayer

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MISSOURI SENATE

Sen. Mayer Clarifies Proposed Open School Enrollment Legislation

As his proposed "open enrollment" legislation makes its way through the Missouri Senate, Sen. Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, seeks to clarify the misinformation that is circulating about the proposed changes to Missouri law.

[Senate Bill 603](#), also known as the "open enrollment" bill, creates procedures for open enrollment of public school students across school district boundary lines starting July 1, 2011, if enacted. The proposed legislation requires the child's parent or guardian to notify both the home district and the receiving district by January 15 of the preceding school year about the change in enrollment, as well as deadline recommendations.

"Open enrollment is not a new concept, it's one that has been implemented in many states, including our neighbors in Arkansas and Iowa, with great results for students, parents, and the school," said Sen. Mayer. "My entire political career has been based on doing the best I can to ensure Missouri's children receive the highest quality of education possible. As chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I will continue to work to fully fund the K-12 foundation formula, which is not fully funded under Governor Nixon's proposed budget. I think this bill solves the issues I have seen all too often, such as parents driving out of their way because of erratic district lines or frustration with academic policies."

The bill requires each school district to adopt a policy that outlines what each district determines to be the appropriate class size and teacher-to-student ratios for every grade level, and no school district is required to admit any student if that ratio has been met or exceeded. Every denial and transfer allowed would be documented, and if a school is meeting its student-to-teacher ratio, they can opt out of the program.

"I think this aspect might be causing the biggest misunderstanding," said Sen. Mayer. "This bill would not create overcrowded classrooms, or cause any extra burden to any teacher. Every teacher would know the maximum number of children they would have in their classroom, and it would be based on that school district's policy." Other provisions in the bill would include:

- **Rules regarding returning to home districts after transfer.** The law is written to allow one transfer out, and one transfer back into the home district. Movement in states that have open enrollment average about 4.7 percent of students utilizing the opportunity, and that is certainly manageable.
- **Standards for students who need special education programs.** Coordination of special education needs and plans will take place between the two schools, and schools that cannot serve certain students do not have to accept them.
- **No changes to the rules governing student athletic participation.** The Missouri State High School Activities Association will continue to govern athletics, and students who transfer will have to sit out a year, as they currently do.
- **Clear funding requirements.** Currently each school gets money from the state based on a per pupil basis. If a student moves from a greater per-pupil funding school to a school that receives less per-pupil funding, some of that funding will travel with the student. If the roles are reversed, then the parents would be required to make up a portion of that difference.
- **Requirements for parents.** Parents would have to apply in January for the open slots that each school declares that they have available, based on their student-to-teacher ratio. The parents would also need to ensure that the transportation needs of the student are met.

"The purpose of this legislation is simple: it gives the parents the freedom to choose a different school district other than the one they live in," said Sen. Mayer. "This lays out clear and specific rules on how we can accomplish open enrollment without being a detriment to any school district. Missouri taxpayers spend about \$3 billion dollars on their school districts, and the least we can do is allow them the opportunity to choose where their children attend classes."

[Senate Bill 603](#) was heard in the Education Committee on February 10. A passing vote would send the measure to the full Senate for debate.